

<sup>30</sup> The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. <sup>31</sup> Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” <sup>32</sup> So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. <sup>33</sup> But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. <sup>34</sup> When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

### HIS MINISTRY MINDSET IS ABOUT MEETING NEEDS, NOT NUMBERS

I saw it as a tragic loss of life. He saw it as a tragic loss of American resources. We were both right, but he was more right than me. We were sitting poolside at a first-grade back-to-school party for our children, talking about the 30 Americans who lost their lives in Afghanistan, many of them Navy Seals. Their failed mission was just a few months after the very successful mission that captured and killed Al-Qaeda terrorist Osama bin Laden. My friend was retired military. He saw more than the loss of thirty American lives. He also saw the loss in millions of dollars of training and in years of experience that would significantly weaken our American military.

The Gospel account appointed for today isn't your typical gospel account. There isn't a specific lesson being taught or a particular event being described. It's a transitional account that moves us from one story to another, from the account of Jesus' sending out of the apostles on a mission trip to the feeding of the 5,000. This not so incidental information in between those accounts allows us to peer into the mind of Jesus when it comes to the mission of the church. His ministry mindset is about meeting needs, not numbers. Jesus meets the needs of His shepherds and Jesus meets the needs of His sheep.

Jesus meets the needs of His shepherds.

Our opening verse starts with the disciples reporting to Jesus how their mission trip went. We don't have any details of that report in front of us, but we do have a couple of unintended consequences, one happy and one not so happy. The happy consequence was, **“so many people were coming and going,”** and the unhappy consequence was, **“they did not have a chance to eat.”** You heard what Jesus said next, but is that what you would have said? If you were Jesus, would you have said to the apostles, **“Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest”**? That ministry mindset is counter intuitive isn't it? Jesus just sent out the apostles to make disciples, to preach that people should repent of their sins and not only are people responding, the people are responding by coming to Jesus and the apostles. Their coming to the Jesus and the apostles is even better than Jesus and the apostles going to them, isn't it?

There are a good number of smart people who would have said to the apostles, “I know you are hungry, but we have to strike while the iron is hot.” “Let's ride this wave of people as long as you can and not mess with a good thing.” And yet in the face of, **“so many people,”** Jesus said to his apostles, **“Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.”**

Who else might Jesus say this to? What groupings today would you say have shepherding responsibilities like the apostles? Pastors certainly fit into this grouping. That's what that title means, shepherd. Husbands, fathers and mothers have shepherding responsibilities too. Husbands are the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. Fathers are specifically told to bring up their children in the training and instruction of the Lord. These are weighty responsibilities. There is going to be pressure to deliver on these responsibilities. I feel this pressure to deliver for you and for my family? Do you feel the pressure to deliver for your family and others? You should feel some pressure. We, who serve in shepherding type roles, whether in our families or in our congregation, have weighty responsibilities. And there is always a temptation for pastors and parents and others with shepherding responsibilities to neglect their own spiritual needs with the good, but misguided intention that this personal neglect will better enable them to deliver spiritual care to the members of their congregation or family. And yet what has been proven to be true when a pastor or a parent is not having their spiritual needs met is that they become much more vulnerable to neglecting their shepherding responsibilities. This happens by walking away from their responsibilities and turning any number of harmful vices as a way to cope with their frustrations. As you can imagine or have seen these dominos fall, this unintended consequence of neglecting one's own spiritual care has a way of making a bad situation at home or in the congregation even worse.

**“Come with me,”** Jesus says to your pastors and parents and others with shepherding responsibilities. **“Come with me by yourselves.”** Don’t bring your children. Send them to their grandparents or hire a baby sitter. For the good of the congregation, pastors need to take a day off and a vacation. **“Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place.”** It’s not really a quiet place, if parents get away from their parental responsibilities only to talk to each other about their parental responsibilities. Likewise, pastors are not really getting away from their congregations if all they do is think about is what they need to do when they get back to their congregations. The goal Jesus has for **“Come with me by yourself to a quiet place,”** is **“and get some rest.”** There is some emotional and mental rest that comes with physical activity or with losing yourself in the story of a movie or a book, but the best rest for pastors and parents and others with shepherding responsibilities is when they are being shepherded by Jesus and the shepherds he has placed over and around them. Our best rest comes when we contemplate what it means to be God’s child through the blood of Christ. Our best rest comes with the knowledge that Jesus is always in our boat, never will Jesus leave us nor forsake us. Everything works out well for Jesus, even the cross, especially the cross and so everything will work out well for us too, even as we carry our crosses, especially as we carry our crosses for Jesus by faithfully shepherding those who are under our spiritual care. The best place for parents and pastors to be is the same place where Jesus took the apostles to be and that is next to the people.

Jesus meets the needs of His sheep.

And that is where Jesus takes the apostles because the people Jesus saw on land, **“were like sheep without a shepherd.”** That’s what Jesus saw as he looked at his crowd. Jesus didn’t see the crowd as a boost to his weekly attendance number or as an opportunity to increase the number of offerings. Jesus saw the crowd as children without parents, as students without teachers, as church members without a pastor. Jesus saw them as souls needing some direction, **“so he began teaching them many things.”**

There was no way to fit the many things Jesus taught that day on paper. Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, knew every single person in that crowd personally. Jesus knew those people better than pastors know their members and better than parents know their children. They would have experienced that, “Oh no, Jesus is talking to me,” we feel every once in a while when the Pastor preaches against a sin we are committing. The crowd also would have felt that tender hug of a parent when Jesus taught them about the kingdom of God and the forgiveness of sins.

Pastors and parents are not equipped to read minds and hearts like Jesus can. Sometimes we can make some educated guesses, but most of the time we are not going to know the particulars of what’s wrong and how we can help make things right unless have a good old-fashioned face-to-face, heart-to-heart conversation about what is going on in your life. And yet what I can tell you on the authority of God’s Word today, is that everything you are going through is addressed through the teaching of God’s Word.

And that’s what Jesus did, but that’s not all Jesus did. Jesus, the great shepherd, met the needs of his sheep by becoming like his sheep. Jesus meets our need because Jesus is holy and blameless, without any kind of defect. Jesus obeyed the will of his heavenly Father every day of his life and then sacrificed for our sins once and for all when he offered himself on the cross. We know parents and pastors can be wrong. And children and members have been pretty good at catching their parents and pastors mistakes. If we know when our parents and pastors are making mistakes then we should also know when our parents and pastors are telling us what the Bible teaches us. Don’t bite off your nose to spite your face and don’t turn away from the teaching of God’s Word because you want to decide how you want to be shepherded. Hear the Word of the Lord and do what it says, especially if you have shepherding responsibilities. You are a great Christian resource for the kingdom of God, lots of time and teaching has been spent on you and the unintended consequences of neglecting your faith is more than just you. Be shepherded! Be taught by Jesus and the pastors and parents and others he has sent you so you in turn can shepherd others. Amen.